

The Bride Guide: The Ultimate Wedding Planning Manual

So, you said “yes” to the big question and are now basking in the glow of your engagement. While you enjoy your moment, don’t let the weight of wedding planning bring you down. In our Entertainment Unlimited Bride Guide, we will outline all the best tips and tricks to help your wedding planning go off without a hitch.

From budgeting to choosing the best entertainment, this guide can help you every step of the way. With these helpful hints and advice, you can spend less time feeling overwhelmed and more time enjoying the exciting process of planning your dream wedding!

Prioritizing Your Budget for Elegant Looks and Rockin’ Entertainment

Once you announce your engagement to your family and friends and establish a date for the event, it is time to begin budgeting. Talk to your significant other as well as your parents to discuss what amount they plan to contribute to the budget so you can determine your bottom line. Also, be sure to budget for a 10% cushion to account for unexpected costs.

Using a notebook or Excel spreadsheet, you can input what you want to spend in each budget category and then note the expenditures for each item. Having a record can help you keep track of your budget, and if you near your limit, you can use these records to find ways to cut costs.

Be sure to prioritize your budget to ensure you allocate enough funds for what is most important to you, such as attire or catering, and decide where the money needs to be spent to show your guests a great time. Creating a list of priorities will help you focus on what is most important to you and will help keep you within budget.

Organizing Your Guest List

Sit down with your significant other and decide on who you will be inviting. As you choose, you can compile a list in a notebook or excel spreadsheet to use throughout the wedding planning process. You can have columns for contact information, gifts, RSVPs, and any other relevant information for each guest. A spreadsheet can help you stay organized and keep an accurate, up-to-date headcount.

Finding Your Dream Venue

There are plenty of options out there for a ceremony or reception site that can suit your style and vision. Once you’ve set our budget, it is important to begin looking at venues and making a list of your top choices. Many popular places will get booked up quickly, so it is important to stay ahead of the curve and schedule visits as early as possible.

Ceremony Site- Choosing your ceremony site will be based on your religious affiliations, preferences, desired wedding style, and the number of guests you need to accommodate. Some venue options include:

- Churches
- Hotels
- Country clubs
- Parks
- Community halls
- Clubs
- Farms/Barns

Keep in mind most sites will charge a fee to rent the facility for your ceremony, so it is essential to confirm this fee and what it includes before you make arrangements.

Reception Site- Keep in mind this venue can set the tone for your wedding with the most popular sites being booked far in advance. There is a wide variety of reception venues available such as fire halls, banquet halls, and country clubs. Choose several of your top venues and begin scheduling visits. Be sure to ask questions during these visits such as:

- What services are included in the venue package?
- How many hours will you be able to rent the space?
- Will there be a day-of coordinator on site?
- Is there a preferred vendor list for the venue?

These questions can help you gather important information that you can use to narrow down your venue list and choose your dream venue. Get as many details as possible during your visit and before booking to avoid any unwanted surprises on your big day. When visiting potential venues, be sure to discuss options for bad weather, if you plan to be outdoors, and be sure to discuss space and capacity capabilities of the venue if you plan to have a live band.

Use local resources to narrow down your options for these venues and utilize wedding websites and even bridal magazines to find the perfect venue. Consider having your ceremony and reception at the same venue to save on a second rental fee and guest transportation.

Transforming Your Venue with Decorations and Lighting

So, you have found the perfect venue. Now it is time to choose your décor and lighting to make the space your own! Once you have chosen your color scheme and overall style, you can begin looking at event décor and begin planning the look for your big day. There are a variety of elements to the decorating process for your wedding that can bring your look together.

Light up Your Event

Lighting is a significant accent to your venue. With a wide range of options out there for lighting, it is essential to know your options.

- **Up Lighting-** This elegant lighting option can be used to create a glow of colored light to accent your wedding colors, cake, flowers, table decorations, or any other elements of your special day.
- **Monogram Lighting-** This lighting can be designed to feature you and your significant other's initials or your names along with the wedding date for an added special touch.

At Entertainment Unlimited, we offer both stunning lighting options to match your décor and create a beautiful ambiance for your special day.

Decorations and Linens for the Perfect Finishing Touch

Finding the right décor and linens can really set the tone for reception and help to complement your wedding's theme and colors. You can save on costs by renting items such as linens and votive candle holders that may be expensive to buy. In some cases, the venue may provide linens and other basics that will be included in the rental cost.

Other items such as table runners are inexpensive to purchase and can be reused for holidays. Customized decorations such as wedding signs should also be purchased, giving you something you can keep to remember your big day!

Entertainment to Set the Tone for Your Big Day

Entertainment is a major factor and is one that can leave a big impression on your guests. Your wedding is a celebration, so what better way to celebrate than to budget for quality and fun entertainment.

One of the most impactful parts of any wedding reception is the entertainment. Before planning your own wedding, you may have attended a few. Think back to how the dance music selections were during the reception or how the harpist performance during cocktail hour set the tone for the evening. Entertainment leaves an impression on your guests and helps you to create lasting memories on your special day.

According to statistics published by St. Louis Bride & Groom Magazine, 72% of all brides, after their weddings, say they would have spent more time choosing the entertainment for their reception. It was also reported that 81% of guests said what they remember most about a wedding is the entertainment. Keeping these statistics and your own experiences at weddings

in mind, quality entertainment is key to making sure you and your guests enjoy the celebration and create fun memories that last for years to come.

Music to Get Your Guests on the Dance Floor

The first ideas for reception entertainment that come to mind for many of us is music. Music is a central piece of any wedding celebration and will set the ambiance of the reception. With a variety of musical options out there, you can set a soundtrack to your ceremony with your favorite love song and you can also set a playlist for your reception that will keep people dancing all night long. Dinner music is another unique option to create an elegant atmosphere during your reception dinner.

There are a wide range of musical options for your wedding offered by Entertainment Unlimited including:

- DJs
- Bagpipers
- Harpists
- Live bands
- String ensembles
- Pianists
- Guitarists

According to statistics published by St. Louis Bride & Groom Magazine, 65% of all couples that hired a live band to entertain at their wedding said they would have chosen a DJ instead if they could do it over again, so be sure to consider the pros and cons of each option and choose what works best for you.

Music is a central piece in bringing your wedding together and can be used to accent your big day, so it is essential to research your options and consult with a professional to plan your musical entertainment.

It is important to begin booking the musical entertainment for your wedding roughly twelve months prior to your wedding to ensure the best DJs or live bands don't get booked up before you can hire them.

Exciting Alternatives to Traditional Entertainment

A tradition at many weddings the is the money dance. This where guests pay to dance with the bride. Money made from this is given to the bride and groom and used for honeymoon funds or for other expenses.

Rather than doing the money dance, which depending on your guest list size, could be exhausting, couples also have the option of utilizing unique options such as playing casino games to win this money. Entertainment Unlimited offers a wide selection of casino games that can be set up for your wedding entertainment for a unique and memorable experience. If you are looking for something outside of the traditional money dance, Entertainment Unlimited has many fun-filled options to choose from. From karaoke to impersonators, there is a one-of-a-kind entertainment option available for you!

Unique Food Options and Traditional Staples for Your Big Day

Finding the Perfect Caterer

There are a variety of factors to consider when you are deciding on catering for your wedding. Are you looking for full-service catering? A more casual, buffet-style dining experience? There are a wide range of options to choose from when it comes to food options for your wedding, so it is important to consider the style of service and the type of food you want to have. It is recommended to begin meeting with caterers eight months prior to the wedding, giving you time to research and book the perfect caterer.

From Texas-style BBQ to Italian-style cuisine, there is a caterer out there to suit your needs and palette. The type of food you choose depends on the tone you want to set for your wedding, so when looking at caterers decide whether you want a formal or informal style of dining. Whether you decide on formal or informal dining, keep in mind that this should be about what you like and what works best for your budget

Fun Food Ideas

If you are looking for something outside of traditional dining, you could have a pizza buffet with a variety of pizza options to choose from or have a taco and nacho bar with all sorts of toppings. You may want to go the sentimental route and have the restaurant where you shared your first date to cater your wedding.

Also, keep in mind that dessert doesn't have to mean just cookies. You could have donuts, smores, or even churro bites for all the sweet-toothed guests! No matter what you choose, have fun with it and let it be an expression of you and your significant other's personalities and tastes.

Pittsburgh Cookie Table

A Pittsburgh area wedding wouldn't be complete without a cookie table. This large table filled with a variety of different cookies is presented to guests at the wedding reception, usually in addition to or in place of a wedding cake. Family members typically prepare the cookies ahead

of the event, baking and freezing them months in advance, so depending on how many cookies you plan to have, it is essential to recruit your bakers early.

If prefer to purchase your cookies from a baker, be sure to plan carefully for this as well. Depending on the number of cookies you need one baker may not be able to accommodate you for all the cookies, so you may have to coordinate with a few other bakers to reach your desired number.

Whether you make them homemade or purchase them, be sure the cookies that could be a risk for people with food allergies are labeled. Also, plan with your venue so they know where to place the cookie table and how many cookies you plan to display so they can arrange proper accommodations.

Champagne Flute Girl

Another unique dinner or cocktail hour feature is a champagne flute display. A woman wears a cage that holds champagne flutes filled with champagne and serves them to guests. The cage is designed and decorated to look like a skirt. With some displays, the cage has small wheels attached that allow the server to move around your event to serve your guests. Entertainment Unlimited can provide this unique feature to help you make quite an impression on your guests!

Open Bar or Cash Bar?

Alcohol is a common element at many weddings. If you plan to have a bar available to provide alcoholic drinks to your wedding guests, there are a few things you should consider:

- **Open bar.** The cost for an open bar at the average wedding can account for roughly 10%-20% of the wedding budget. To best estimate your costs, you can assume that each drink costs you around \$5. You can multiply \$5 by the number of guests multiplied by the number of hours for your open bar to get an estimated cost.
- **Bringing your own alcohol.** If your venue allows you to bring in outside alcohol and insured bartenders, you may be able to cut costs for your open bar. When determining how much alcohol you would need to buy, you can go by this example: For every 100 guests, you will need 67 bottles of beer, 14 bottles of wine and 4 bottles of liquor per hour, with the average wedding having a bar available for up to 5 hours.
- **Beer and wine only can keep the crowd tame.** Another worry of having a full, unlimited open bar, is that some guests may consume too much alcohol and get out of control. If this is a worry of yours, you can consider having a limited bar with only wine and beer available.
- **Cash Bar.** A cash bar is where the bar is fully hosted, and all drinks are paid for by guests. It can help you cut down costs and save you room in your budget if an open bar

is not an option, but you would still like to provide alcohol. It is generally frowned upon to have a cash bar at your wedding, but it depends on your guests. You know them best, so you can determine how it will be received at your reception if you decide on a cash bar. Do what is best for you and your budget!

You can calculate your costs of purchasing the alcohol yourself and compare it to the packages offered by your caterer or your venue and see what works best for your budget. You can limit your cost for the open bar by only providing beer, wine, and a few signature cocktails also known as a limited open bar, rather than paying for a wide range of alcohol.

Or you can choose to have unlimited beer and wine for your guests and have a cash bar for mixed drinks. No matter what you choose, do what works best for you and don't feel pressured to stretch your budget.

Photography and Videography for Capturing Your Special Day

Having photos or a video of your wedding is important so you can share these memories and reminisce about this happy occasion for years to come. Photographs perfectly capture the moments of happiness at your wedding and a video can give you a touching piece of your life's history you can watch whenever your heart desires. Both are wonderful ways to freeze a moment in time so that you can cherish and relive it.

Whether you decide to use a photographer, a videographer or both, it is important to find a reputable and trusted source to capture your big day. Entertainment Unlimited can provide you with a photographer or a videographer that is fully licensed and bonded to help ensure quality service for your special day while also providing you with custom video and photo packages to suit your budget and your needs.

Capturing these special moments is an important task, so be sure to do your research and choose someone you trust. It is important to begin researching photographers and videographers sixteen to nine months before the wedding. It is recommended to hire your photographer or videographer eight months before your wedding to help ensure the more sought-after photographers and videographers will be available for your event.

Travel in Style on Your Wedding Day

Transportation is another way you can add style and flair to your wedding day. From fancy limousines to shuttle buses, there is an option that can accommodate your wedding's theme and your wedding party. Other more unique options such as carriages and antique or luxury cars are also options to consider for your transportation needs.

If you have a more substantial number of guests that need to be transported, a shuttle is a great option. If you are only transporting your bridal party, a limousine is an elegant choice and can usually accommodate the average wedding party. Carriages and antique cars are an excellent option for you and your significant other to arrive and wow your guests! They also provide unique photo and video opportunities that can add a fun element to your wedding memories.

Etiquette for Inviting Children or Having a Child-free Wedding

Some people are excited to have children at their wedding, while some may worry children could disrupt the day. No matter what your stance is on inviting children or not inviting them, it is crucial to handle the matter with the proper etiquette and modern manners. Consider these tips to help avoid confusion or hurt feelings:

- **Decide early.** Decide if children will be invited or not to allow parents to make arrangements for childcare if needed.
- **Properly address your envelopes.** If the child/children are invited, include their name on the invitation.
- **Call your guests with children.** Before you send the invitation or soon after, call your friends and family who have children and explain that your wedding is or isn't child-friendly.

If you do decide to invite children to your wedding, be sure to provide entertainment for them. You can have a designated kids table for them to sit at for eating and crafts. You can also browse the various entertainment options offered by Entertainment Unlimited. We can provide everything from magicians to interactive games to help keep children entertained throughout the evening.

Choosing Favors that Guests Will Cherish

Wedding favors give your guests a small keepsake of your wedding. It's important to stick to favors that your guests will keep, eat, or display in their homes.

- **Keepsake Photos-** Having a photo booth at your wedding is an excellent way for your guests to make their own keepsake they can take home. Photo booths can be customized to print the photos with a tagline such as your wedding hashtag or wedding date with your names. Entertainment Unlimited can provide you with a photo booth equipped with props tailored to your wedding and customized text on the photo prints for a personalized touch.
- **Edible Favors-** Candy, cookies, cupcakes are all great edible favors to consider. With edible favors, the possibilities are endless. You can purchase candy boxes in your

wedding colors or go a step further and have custom labels made for candy bars for a fun, personalized touch.

- **Practical Favors-** If your wedding is being held outdoors in the summer heat, handheld battery-powered fans or sunglasses would be useful and functional favors to give your guests and something they are likely to keep and use again.
- **Caricatures-** Another unique favor for your guests is having a caricature portrait done. These fun, exaggerated portraits will provide laughs and lasting memories for your guests, giving them a favor they can hang in their home as a memory of your special day. Entertainment Unlimited has many caricaturists to choose from and can help you pick the best one for your event.

No matter what type of favor you choose, keep it personal and let it be an expression of you and your partner's personalities. You could donate to a charity or organization that is important to you and your significant other rather than spending the money on favors.

Planning Your Rehearsal Dinner

The rehearsal dinner is not only a great way to make sure everyone is on the same page for the big day, but it is also a nice opportunity to enjoy a meal with friends and family in a more laid-back setting before all the excitement that will follow the next day.

The setting of your rehearsal dinner can be more informal. You can have an outdoor picnic or barbeque, or you can have the dinner at nice restaurant. Couples host their rehearsal dinners at many places, from their backyards to art galleries. In the end, the rehearsal dinner setting will likely depend on your budget.

At the rehearsal dinner you will have the chance to:

- Greet and catch up with family and friends since the next day may be a bit of a blur
- Give your bridesmaids their gifts
- Provide last minute reminders for the next day to ensure everyone knows what is going on and knows where they need to be

Traditionally at the end of the dinner, the groom's father or mother will offer a toast and the groom will also toast to his new wife, the guests, and the hosts. You can all thank your guests together as well. You want to book your rehearsal dinner and venue five to four months before the wedding. If you book it early, it gives guests to make arrangements to attend and helps to ensure you can get a date scheduled at a busier venue or restaurant.

Remember to Have Fun!

Through all the decisions and planning, just keep in mind how special your wedding day will be and try to remember to enjoy the moment! Use this guide and the checklist that is included at the end of this guide as a reference to help you stay on track but don't let all the planning and the details bog you down!

Entertainment Unlimited can help you with many major aspects of your wedding planning and can help guide you through all the options while you plan your special day. We want your day to be a happy occasion, so we are here to help you choose your options and celebrate your big day!

The Bride Guide's Ultimate Wedding Checklist

Sixteen to Nine Months Before

- € Decide on your budget.
- € Pick your wedding party and inform those who are chosen.
- € Start putting together your guest list.
- € Hire a wedding planner, if desired.
- € Reserve your date and venues.
- € Book your officiant.
- € Begin researching photographers, bands, florists, and caterers.

Twelve Months Before

- € Book your entertainment.
- € Hire the photographer or the videographer.

Eight Months Before

- € Meet with caterers.
- € Sign up for gift registries at your desired stores.
- € Purchase your dress.

Seven to Six Months Before

- € Purchase your invitations.
- € Find out how many people you will need to transport and arrange transportation.
- € Start putting together a schedule for the day of the wedding to keep things on track.
- € Shop for bridesmaids' dresses.
- € Meet with your officiant to go over your plan for the wedding.
- € Send out save-the-date cards.
- € Book a florist.
- € Start planning your honeymoon.

Five to Four Months Before

- € Book the rehearsal and rehearsal dinner venues.
- € Choose your music for your wedding playlist.
- € Provide the host of your bridal shower with your guest list.
- € Schedule tastings, select and order the cake.
- € Purchase your shoes and start your dress fittings.
- € Schedule the hair and makeup artists.

Three Months Before

- € Finalize the menu with the caterer.
- € Finalize your flower order.
- € Order favors or begin making them/assembling them, if needed.
- € Finalize the list of people who will be giving toasts at the reception.
- € Purchase your undergarments and schedule your second dress fitting.
- € Print menu cards as well as programs, if needed.
- € Purchase the wedding bands.
- € Send your event schedule to all vendors.

Two Months Before

- € Touch base again with all the vendors and reconfirm all necessary details.
- € Meet with your photographer and go over some poses or photo ideas you may want.
- € Review your playlist with the live band or DJ.
- € Send out the invitations.
- € Submit a newspaper wedding announcement, if desired.
- € Enjoy your bachelorette party!

One Month Before

- € Enter any RSVPs into your guest-list database.
- € Reach out to guests who haven't RSVP'd yet.
- € Put together your seating chart.
- € Get your marriage license.
- € Visit the dressmaker for your last dress fitting.
- € Send out as many final payments to vendors as you can.
- € Confirm times for all vendors.
- € E-mail or print directions for drivers of transport vehicles.
- € Purchase the gifts for your bridesmaids.
- € Write your vows, if desired.

The Week of the Wedding

- € Send the final guest list to the caterer and to all the venues hosting any of your wedding-related activities.
- € Reconfirm arrival times with all vendors.
- € Set aside the checks for the vendors along with their tips.
- € Delegate small wedding-day tasks to bridal party members.
- € Give a copy of the wedding day schedule to your bridal party.
- € Pick up your dress.

- € Check in one last time with the photographer.
- € Break in your shoes for a more comfortable walk down the aisle.
- € Pack for your honeymoon.